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ABSTRACT

There continues to be a public outcry concerning the quality of education in our nation. These concerns have translated into numerous programs to improve teaching in the public schools, many of which have focused on mentoring for beginning teachers. The proliferation of programs has shown the need for research investigating the effectiveness of various mentoring programs. The literature provides extensive descriptions of these programs, but little empirical data exists for examining the outcomes resulting from the implementation of such programs (Klub and Salzman 1990). Research by Varah, Theune, and Parker (1986) and by Schlecty and Vance (1983) has shown that as many as 30 percent of beginning teachers do not teach beyond two years, and as many as 60 percent leave the profession during the first 5 years. Griffen (1985) reports that beginning teachers often lack competence in planning for instruction and in adjusting to the classroom environment. These two factors, teacher efficacy and teacher retention, can be used to direct a review of the existing literature and to separate the empirical studies of program outcomes from program descriptions. This review is needed to assess the effectiveness of mentoring programs. (Contains 38 references.) (Author/LL)

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Mentoring: A Review of the Literature

Linda Walker
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A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association

Knoxville, Tennessee
November 1992

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Abstract

There continues to be a public outcry concerning the quality of education in our nation. These concerns have translated into numerous programs to improve teaching in the public schools. Many of these programs have focused on mentoring for beginning teachers. The proliferation of programs has shown the need for research investigating the effectiveness of various mentoring programs. The literature provides extensive description of these programs, but little empirical data exists for examining the outcomes resulting from the implementation of such programs, (Klug and Salzman, 1990). Research by Varah, Theune, and Parker, (1986), as well as Schlechty and Vance, (1983), has shown that as many as 30% of beginning teachers do not teach beyond two years, and as many as 60% leave the profession during the first five years. Griffen, (1985), reports that beginning teachers often lack competence in planning for instruction and in adjusting to the classroom environment. These two factors, teacher efficacy and teacher retention, can be used to direct a review of the existing literature, and to separate the empirical studies of program outcomes from program descriptions. This review is needed to assess the effectiveness of mentoring programs.

Introduction

Mentoring: A Review of the Literature

In recent years we have seen a flurry of national and state reports voicing dissatisfaction with the quality of public education and putting forth recommendations for its improvement (e.g., A Nation at Risk, National Commission on Excellence, 1983; A Nation Prepared, Carnegie Commission, 1986; Tomorrow's Teachers, Holmes Group, 1986; Who Will Teach Our Children?, California Commission on the Teaching Profession, 1985). Key issues have been identified and debated, and action taken in many states. One of the key issues is mentoring or teacher induction for new teachers. Research has documented the critical nature of the first year of teaching. The new teacher's developmental growth, attitudes, feelings, style of teaching, expectations and decision to remain in teaching are all influenced by the first year experience.

The goal of improving teacher quality probably would not, by itself, have spurred the current level of interest in beginning teacher program activity. It took projections of a teacher shortage to focus state and national level attention on the supply and retention of new teachers. It is

estimated that by the year 2000, the nation will need to replace half of its 2.2 million teachers due to retirement and attrition. The supply-side picture is dismal. Only 6.2 percent of entering college students in 1988 were interested in teaching as a career; over twenty percent showed an interest two decades ago (Schlechty & Vance, 1983). Moreover, as many as eighty percent of these teachers are gone from the classrooms within ten years. This attrition of teachers from public education represents a tremendous loss of public investment in teacher preparation. This substantiates the immediate need for some type of program of teacher induction to deal with the issues of successful first-year teaching as well as teacher retention. Mentoring can serve as a viable choice to not only achieve these goals, but to also enhance the personal and professional lives of both the novice and the veteran teacher.

Mentoring is not a new concept; in actuality it has survived for more than 3,500 years, arising from Greek mythology. The actual origin of the term "mentor" has its roots in Homer's Greek epic poem, The Odyssey. In this myth, Odysseus, a great royal warrior is preparing to leave his family and kingdom to fight in the Trojan War. He has been

warned that, once gone on this mission, he may not be able to return for 20 years. Odysseus asked a trusted, wise and learned friend, Mentor, to oversee his possessions in his absence. The entrusting of his beloved son, Telemachus, is symbolic of the esteem in which Mentor is held. Mentor faithfully watched over Odysseus's interests and advised Telemachus. According to Clawson (1980), this advisement was not confined to the martial arts, but was to include every facet of his life - physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and emotional development. Thus, mentor has come to mean an experienced and trusted counselor. Anderson and Shannon (1988) conclude from The Odyssey that modeling a standard and style of behavior is a central quality of mentoring and that mentoring is an intentional, nurturing, insightful, supportive, protective process.

History is replete with examples of the caring, nurturing, and sometimes challenging relationships of this kind, including Socrates and Plato, Freud and Jung, Lorenzo de Medici and Michelangelo, and Haydn and Beethoven. Other more contemporary instances include the novelist, Thomas Wolfe, whose mentor was his high school English teacher; Thomas Edison, who was encouraged and hired by Western Union

executive Marshall Lefferts; and the legendary Babe Ruth, who without the encouragement of a Catholic school teacher, would probably never have survived in the world of baseball. Thus, the word mentor has become synonymous with wise teacher, counselor, encourager, philosopher, confidante, and friend.

A current definition of a mentor is someone who is always there for collegial support, but not dependency. It is through interaction within a positive working relationship that proteges or novices are encouraged to achieve their personal and professional goals. The novice goes to the mentor with the expectation that the mentor will not only know how to do things, but more importantly, will know how to do things right, (Playko, 1990). The mentor helps guide a protege through a developmental phase, whether that phase is the transition from childhood to adulthood or from student to professional.

The heart and soul of mentoring is an outgrowth of a belief in the value and worth of people and an attitude toward education that focuses upon passing the torch to the next generation of teachers (Head, Reiman, and Theis-Sprinthall, 1992). Implicit within this philosophy is the idea of "each one,teach one", because to teach is to learn twice.

We cannot afford to complacently stand by with an impending teacher shortage in both the quality and quantity of our nation's teachers. In the 90's and beyond, the demand for new teachers will continue to escalate. Also, the situation will worsen due to high retirement rates and more rigorous credentialing standards. This is why the induction of new teachers cannot be left to chance. Supporting the professional development of an inexperienced teacher is both challenging and rewarding. The ultimate payoff is an outstanding educator for our future and our children's future.

Review of the Literature

The main goal of any mentoring or teacher induction program is to increase the likelihood that new teachers will experience success during their first year in the classroom, thus giving positive encouragement toward remaining in the profession. According to a study by Klug and Saltzman (1990), the proliferation of mentoring programs has clearly shown the need for research investigating the effectiveness of these programs. The literature provides extensive descriptions of teacher needs and competencies, but little empirical data exists for examining the effects of the different mentor programs.

Henry (1988) reports that national statistics show that the percentage of entry level teachers who leave teaching after the first year is thirteen percent. Among the many reasons which have led to the flight of these novice teachers is their inability to cope with the complexity of demands presented during their first year. The condition of not knowing is common to beginning teachers. No matter how extensive the beginner's preservice education, beginning teachers are faced by and accountable for or to unknown students, teaching colleagues, administrators, university supervisors, and parents. In the midst of so many strangers, it is difficult to know to whom to turn or even where to begin (Corcoran, 1981). The preponderance of literature throughout the 80's and early 90's has focused on mentoring with regard to the issues of program descriptions, implementation tactics, selection procedures, roles of the mentor and protege, training processes, and the formulation of an incentive program to encourage and reward mentors. Noticeably absent has been the inclusion of information dealing with the evaluation of these programs, how they are judged in regard to their effectiveness in retaining teachers in the profession, as well as whether we can determine the worth of this type of program in terms of not only success for our

novice teachers but for our children in those classrooms of "mentored" teachers. Simply put, are new teachers more effective after a mentoring program instituted in their first year of teaching? Also absent from the literature is evidence of delineated characteristics that can be used to define a "successful" mentoring program. Are there commonalities among those programs that are deemed successful, and if so, what are they? The answer to these questions and others will better enable teacher educators to prepare first-year teachers for a more personally and professionally satisfying first year of teaching.

Thies-Sprinthall (1990) has characterized beginning teachers as needing:

1. "Help in developing as competent persons, but not involvement in a program in which mentoring is used as a screening process.

2. Mentors who are on site and skilled as peer coaches with communication abilities and skills in conferencing, classroom observation, problem-solving, etc.

3. Time to work with their mentor and develop new skills in long and short term planning, classroom instruction, paperwork

management, work with parents, etc.

4. Opportunities to talk with other beginning teachers in a setting free of evaluation.

5. Orientation to the school, including planning for the first day and week of school, learning the location of materials, parent conferences, curriculum overview, orientation to the community, etc.

6. Realistic teaching assignment especially regarding the number and type of classes the beginning teacher is assigned to teach.

7. Understanding the context in which the protege is teaching (school climate, type of teaching assignment, work with at-risk students, gifted and talented students, minority students, etc.)."

It is clear that beginning teachers need careful and systematic assistance during the induction phase of their careers (Berliner, 1985; Johnston and Ryan, 1983; Veenman, 1984).Teaching seems to be the only profession where the beginner becomes fully responsible from the first working day and is expected to perform the same tasks and duties as a 25-year veteran. According to Enz (1991), we give new teachers a complex puzzle, complete with frame and all the pieces, but with very few clues as to what the whole picture should look like. The new teacher

spends his or her first year desperately trying to learn by trial and error how the pieces fit together. In a 1989 survey conducted with 3,000 Association of Teacher Educators members, comprised of university faculty and administrators, teachers, and state department of education officials, respondents were asked to rank five issues they believed to be most important in the field of teacher education. Ranked first by the respondents was the issue of mentoring, specifically stated as "Teacher education programs must include mentoring beginners during their first year of service" (Buttery, et al, 1990).

With the high dropout rate among beginning teachers, it is imperative that we train mentors in helping beginning teachers to develop their personal skills and to become more self-confident if they are to survive (Gold, 1990b). The pressures encountered by these beginning teachers are often so great that many are discouraged from staying past the first few years of teaching. Beginning teachers are often left to their own devices in order to survive their first year. Those who have a strong self-concept and are able to rely on their own strength somehow make it through those trying times, while others who lack that inner strength and resilience, and are also unaware of their own personal need to build

support agents, succumb to the stress and disillusionment that often culminates in burnout and subsequent failure (Veenman, 1984).

The stakes are high for our teachers. Currently forty to fifty percent of them leave education after teaching seven years or less (Huling-Austin,1989). Studies by Schlechty and Vance (1983) found that about thirty percent of beginning teachers do not teach beyond two years, and that as many as sixty percent leave teaching after being in the classroom for only five years. Nationwide, approximately fifteen percent of the new teachers leave after their first year of teaching, compared to the overall rate of six percent. This means that the first-year teacher is two-and-a-half times more likely to leave the profession than his or her more experienced counterpart. Even more disturbing than these statistics is the result of a Wisconsin study (1984) which revealed that the most academically able are among the first to leave education, and that they are doing so in increasing numbers.

Mentoring has tremendous power to assist in inducting neophytes into a profession (Reiman, McNair, McGee, & Hines, 1988). We must understand the complexity of mentoring and work with its process and function if we are to actualize its potential to make a difference for

beginning teachers and education as a whole (Gehrke, 1988; Huling-Austin, 1990; Kay, 1990; Little, 1990; Reiman, 1991; Theis-Sprinthall and Sprinthall, 1987).

The task of helping teachers survive their first years is a challenge for teacher educators. With the dropout and burnout rate at excessive levels, we must give serious attention to the personal and psychological needs of our beginning teachers as well as their professional needs (Gold, 1990b). The transition from student teacher to first-year teacher is a traumatic encounter with what has been aptly called "reality shock". Most beginning teachers enter the classroom with idealistic and often unrealistic expectations. Once they begin teaching, panic sets in as they realize the extent of their responsibility and the limitation of their skills. This results in an intense, stressful, trial-and-error period. They often have problems with determining what to teach and how, discipline, motivation of students, dealing with a diversity of individual differences, and basic classroom organization skills. Reluctant to complain, and unable to interact freely with veteran teachers, they begin to feel isolated and disillusioned. According to Little (1990), the teaching profession has a long tradition of isolation and a cultural myth of self-sufficiency.Because

of this, there is hesitancy on the part of novice teachers to ask for assistance from their colleagues. Often, even with the invitation from a veteran teacher to ask if you have questions, it is unlikely that the novice will do so. The very act of requesting any type of help or assistance causes the beginner to feel inadequate and often promotes a sense of failure. Huling-Austin (1990) found that the beginning teacher will accept and respond to assistance more readily when it is directly offered rather than when it must be requested.

Mentoring, according to Neal (1984), is a special relationship between the protege and experienced teacher that holds tremendous potential for the professional development of new teachers during their initial years of teaching. Borko (1986) stressed that this is a critical time for professional development because teachers are establishing patterns and attitudes that may persist throughout a career of teaching. The findings from a national sample of 1,007 beginning teachers (The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1991) emphasized that new teachers do favor the opportunity to receive assistance from skilled veteran teachers. This sample was asked to identify what would have been most helpful in preparing them to become more effective first-year

teachers. Forty-six percent responded that an experienced teacher who was assigned to them for the purpose of advisement and assistance would have been most helpful. This shows the recognition of the value of a mentor in contributing to their preparation and their effectiveness.

Brown and Wambach (1987) reported that having mentors who support beginning teachers right out of college helps them to cope with mistakes, burnout, and job dissatisfaction. Findings from experimental research also indicates that induction or mentoring for new teachers increases retention and serves to lessen first-year difficulties. A key element to this form of induction is that a mentor must be able to listen with three ears: first, listening to what a person says; secondly, listening to what a person does not say; and lastly, listening to what a person wants to say but does not know how to say.

An excellent comprehensive view of mentoring is provided in the Association of Teacher Educators publication, Mentoring, Contemporary Principles and Issues, edited by Bey and Holmes, (1992). This book offers insights into a diversity of issues including the principles of mentoring, psychological support for mentors and beginning teachers, guidelines for selection, design of training programs, and evaluating the

program. It is one of a few publications which offer any type of substantive ideas for evaluation and assessment. Another is a study by Mager and others (1990) which focused on the mentoring project in place in New York during the first two years of the project, 1986-1988. This study included an evaluation in the form of a questionnaire administered to the interns or novices, primarily in qualitative format, directed toward feelings, attitudes, relationships, positive and/or negative occurrences, and commitment toward the teaching profession at different points in the project.

Conclusion and Implications

There are currently legislative actions in over thirty states seeking to standardize and formalize mentoring and teacher induction programs (Huling-Austin, 1989b). The aims of mentoring, as identified by all groups, are to induct and retain novice teachers, to reward and revitalize experienced teachers, and to increase professional efficacy. The abundance of programs already in place attests to the fact that mentoring is now regarded as not only a passing educational fad, but as a philosophically sound process by which novices can become more proficient in their profession through structured and planned experiences

with a veteran teacher. The programs in evidence, for instance, the California Mentor Teacher Program instituted in the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1984; the DeKalb County, Georgia Teacher Education and Mentoring Program (TEAM); the Raleigh, North Carolina Induction Program; the Houston,Texas Independent School District Teacher Induction Program (TIP); the Kentucky Beginning Teacher Internship Program; the New York State Mentor Teacher Internship Project (MTIP); the Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Partnership, (NNMTP); the Kansas Internship Program; the Teacher Induction Program of Wheeling, West Virginia; and the Evergreen Collegial Teacher Training Consortium of Vancouver, Washington, are reviewed extensively in the current literature with detailed descriptions of all the necessary components to enable others to develop a mentoring program in their district. There is clear evidence that students who serve an internship with an experienced mentor teacher demonstrate stronger coping skills, along with a multiplicity of effective teaching strategies and skills.

Mentoring, with its rich historical background, could be an excellent source of renewal and increased commitment to the profession.

It is evident that we need to further investigate the progress and effectiveness of those programs already in place, and continue to design and implement new programs, with evaluative and assessment components in place, for the upcoming twenty-first century.

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